

What does it mean to have it all? What does it mean to YOU to have it all?

Before Kellyanne Conway (**picture**), David Axelrod (**picture**), Frank Luntz (**picture**) or James Carville (**picture**), there was Lee Atwater (**picture**). Do you remember that name, Lee Atwater? If you know American politics, especially the politics of the late 1980's, you know who he was. Atwater was the amazing man who almost singlehandedly engineered the election of George H. Bush as President in 1988. He's the guy who made Willie Horton a household name. He once told George Bush, *"You can talk all you want about this kinder and gentler stuff, but it's not going to get you any votes."*

Lee Atwater will be remembered as the modern day father of negative campaigning. He's not the one who started it, but he popularized it and made it successful on a national scale. It's fair to say that Lee Atwater fully earned his reputation as *"the bad boy of American politics."* He was a mean-spirited, arrogant egotist. Even his friends considered him something of a lovable scoundrel.

By his own admission, he had two goals in life. One was to be a successful manager of a Presidential campaign. The second was to be the leader of a national political party. He accomplished both by the time he was 39 years old. Having successfully managed the candidacy of George Bush in 1988, he reached his second goal when then President-elect, George H. Bush, named him the Chairman of the Republican National Committee. Lee Atwater was one of the most respected and feared political operatives in America.

At the age of 39, he was on top of the world **but** then out of nowhere, Atwater developed a massive brain tumor. He was treated and instead of getting better, he got worse, and worse and worse. February 1991 *Life* magazine published an article in which he evaluates his life in light of his terminal illness. Here are the words of Lee Atwater (**quote**): *"The eighties were about acquiring—acquiring wealth, power, prestige. I know. I acquired more wealth, power and prestige than most. But you can acquire all you want and still feel empty."*

What power wouldn't I trade for a little more time with my family? What price wouldn't I pay for an evening with a friend? It took a deadly illness to put me eye to eye with that truth, but it is a truth that the country, caught up in its ruthless ambitions and moral decay, can learn on my dime. I don't know who will lead us through the '90s, but they must be made to speak to this spiritual vacuum at the heart of American society, this tumor of the soul." Here was a man who seemingly had it all and when he got it all, he discovered it wasn't enough.

Once there was a young man with big dreams about the future. He's 20 or 25...maybe 30, but not any older than that. He's driven, a go-getter, a young guy climbing his way to the top. Today he might be Joe Gebbia (**picture**) who founded *Airbnb* or Evan Spiegel (**picture**) who launched *Snapchat*.

Though young, he's already made lots of money. He's an entrepreneur with business savvy to burn. He's at the top of the world, but he still felt empty.

One day he went to see a teacher, a carpenter from Galilee, named Jesus. This young guy who had it all knew something was missing. He listened at edge of the crowd, as Jesus held babies, blessing them, saying to His disciples, *"Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God."*

When he finally sees a break in the crowd, he pulls Jesus aside with a question, *"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

The conversation that he had with Jesus that day evidently made a tremendous impact on the early church. This account is repeated not just once or twice, but three times. You'll find it in Matthew, Mark and Luke. My Bible is open to Luke 18:18-30 (p. 877).

It's a tragedy. This rich young ruler may be the only person in the Gospels who came to Jesus but went away in worse condition than he came. And He has so much going for him...he's rich, moral, earnest and sincere. He'd have been a great addition to Jesus' band of followers. But he refused to give up his *"one thing"* to follow Christ and went his own way in great sorrow.

The term *"eternal life"* brackets this narrative (verses 18, 30). It's the theme of this account. The heart of the lesson is that we must understand the cost required to receive eternal life.

The other key word is *"all."* This young man believed that he'd kept *"all"* of the commandments and Jesus asks him to surrender it *"all."*

Jesus blows it, at least as far as we're concerned. This isn't the way we'd handle this in the church today. Salvation is free. It costs nothing. So, what's this about selling everything or surrendering all? We'd have gotten him in the church, but Jesus is concerned about his eternity and getting him in the kingdom of heaven. If it'd been anyone other than Jesus who took this approach, we'd all say that He blew it big time. But Jesus is teaching us that while eternal life is free, it costs you everything. There are **four main lessons** we want to focus on this morning. If you're taking notes.

1. Most of us think that we're "gooder" than we are. This young man approaches eternal life like it's one more business deal. What must I "do" to inherit eternal life? What's the bottom line, what's the cost?

His calling Jesus "good" is very unusual, which is why Jesus questions it. Only God was "good." One never referred to a Rabbi or spiritual leader as "good." "Good" was only reserved for God. God's goodness is a persistent motif in the Old Testament. "*Good and upright is the Lord*" (Ps. 25:8). "*Taste and see that the Lord is good*" (Ps. 34:8). Though this young man doesn't realize it, Jesus is "good" because He is God, the God-man.

So, this young man believes God is good, He acknowledges that Jesus was "good." It's apparent, too, that he thinks someone else is "good" – himself. And that's the problem.

Then, he erroneously believes that he can "do" something for eternal life. A works righteousness always leads to insecurity and anxiety. You never know whether you've done enough to please God in an ultimate way.

Eternal life for the Jewish mind was more than heaven. It was a kind or quality of life, rather than merely a duration of life. It's a life God Himself possesses and gives to His children. It's what God wants to give us with eternal life. It's not only heaven. It's about having heaven in your life now.

This young man says, "what must I do to *inherit* eternal life?" Eternal life can't be inherited. It's personal. It's always first generational. God doesn't have any grandchildren. He only has children. To go to heaven you must have a personal relationship with Christ. No one can say, "Well, my father or my grandmother had eternal life." You must personally have eternal life.

Jesus follows up with him about the second half of the Decalogue or Ten Commandments. He inquires about the horizontal or relational ones. '*Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.*'" Jesus knows that if this young man did some serious self-reflection, he'd know that he'd failed and wasn't good.

What's most frightening is his self-delusion. "*And he said, 'All these I have kept from my youth.'*" Commenting on this, J.C. Ryle (**picture**) said, "*An answer more full of darkness and self-ignorance it is impossible to conceive!*" He's sincere but sincerely wrong. It's moral idiocy. His response is very common today. Many today think of the 10 Commandments as a short list of very bad sins that they almost never commit. They believe that they're able to be good and keep God's law. Or, at least keep it well enough to impress God enough to get in heaven. Do you think that? I hope not.

Obedience to the 10 Commandments is not just action, it includes our thoughts, which Jesus explained in Matthew 5. When the Bible says, "You shall not murder," it's not just talking about taking a gun and putting it to someone's head. Jesus said that if you have an angry thought about someone or hate someone, just that thought is murder in your mind.

Remember what Jesus said about adultery. Even to look at another person sexually, to lust after them, is breaking the command against adultery even though you never jump in bed with someone who's not your spouse. To look at porn is adultery.

Then, if you goof off at work or fudge on your taxes, you're stealing. If you tell a half-truth, if you exaggerate, you've given false witness or lied. If you were ever disrespectful to your Dad or Mom, you haven't honored them.

And obedience to the Decalogue isn't just negative. Each one also has a positive side. It's not enough to not lie. You must also be committed to truth. It's not enough to not murder someone. We're also to love others. It's not enough to not steal. We must also be generous. The Law is not just a big "Don't," it's also a big, huge "Do."

The hard truth is that we've broken every commandment innumerable times. We're murderers, adulterers, thieves, liars and disrespectful to our parents. We're all lawbreakers. James 2:10, "*For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.*"

It's like this. If you're driving too fast and got a ticket, you could tell the judge, "I've never murdered anyone," but it won't get you off. You could say, "I've never robbed a bank. I've always paid my taxes. I go to church." It wouldn't matter. You broke the law and the judge will impose the penalty.

Suppose that you went to buy a new mirror and the clerk tried to sell you one with a crack in it. He says, "It's just a small crack. The rest of the mirror is just fine." Sorry! One crack makes a broken mirror.

One sin makes you a sinner and law-breaker. We all have sinned, not just once, but repeatedly. Those who think they're good enough to qualify for heaven, need to hold their behavior, including their thoughts, up to the standard of God's perfect Law. They need to feel, as Spurgeon put it, the rope around their necks, that they stand guilty and condemned before God.

2. Many have "one thing" that keeps them out of heaven. "*When Jesus heard this, He said to him, 'One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.'* But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad,

said, 'How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God'."

The Southern Baptist evangelist, Vance Havner (**picture**) said, "A wife who is 85% faithful to her husband is not faithful at all. There is no such thing as part-time loyalty to Jesus Christ." That's Jesus' point. This man's "one thing" showed that he's in violation of the 1st commandment and probably the 10th. They're perhaps the hardest to obey. The first is, "You shall have no other gods before Me." The tenth, "You shall not covet." We violate both continually and so did this young entrepreneur.

What Jesus asks of him, is and isn't, a universal instruction for every Christ-follower. We're not commanded to give everything away to have eternal life. In a few weeks we'll study a tax collector, Zacchaeus. He wasn't asked to do that. But like this young man, our wealth and anything we possess can be our *one thing*. To be a Christ-follower demands 100% surrender. This young man loved his possessions more than he loved God. What about you? What about me?

He was overcome with profound sadness because he was rich and couldn't possibly bring himself to give it up. Dante (**picture**) alludes to this as "*The Great Refusal*." It was there that this young man became a wandering star – lost and haunted by what might have been.

Please understand. Jesus is not requiring asceticism or suggesting a life of poverty. You don't have to have money to love money. A poor person can love money as much, or even more, than a rich person.

What Jesus is demanding is total commitment and repentance. It's like a man in the upper story of a burning high-rise. It's been his home and he loves it, but the building is on fire. If he wants to save his life, he must give it all up. If he clings to his things, he'll die in the smoke and flames. Repentance is turning from those things to the open window. Faith is jumping out the window into the safety net which firefighters have spread below. Both are necessary for one to be saved. It's why Scripture continually circles around to three groups who have difficulty with "*one thing*." ***The very rich, the very moral and the very intelligent.***

The very rich. What if Jesus did ask us to sell it all to follow Him? Would we do it? We're not very far from being this young man. That's seen in the interpretive gymnastics many take to change the meaning of "*For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.*"

Former scientist, Dr. Andy Christofides (**picture**), came up with a solution on how to get a camel through the eye of a needle. You'd liquidize the camel and then fire a thread from the liquid on a laser beam through the eye of a needle. After a few days, depending on the size of the camel and speed of the thread going through the tiny opening, you could in theory pass the whole dead camel through the needle's eye.

Jesus didn't say this so we'd make up such fancy answers, or make up some alleged gate in Jerusalem called the Camel's Eye, which was too low for a loaded camel and rider to pass through. No such gate ever existed. What Jesus said, He meant. A camel was the largest animal the Jews had seen. There is no special gate in Jerusalem called the "Needle Gate."

Rich individuals struggle to surrender to Jesus completely. You can't be saved unless you humble yourself and first admit how spiritually impoverished you are. Humility and wealth rarely reside in the same person.

The very moral. Pride keeps moral people out of heaven. Jesus taught that good people miss heaven because their pride keeps them from admitting their need for a Savior. The only ones who go to heaven are those who see their wretched sinfulness before a holy God and cry out to Him for mercy.

It's not about moral people not getting into heaven. The problem is much worse! The real question is, *Who on earth can get in at all?* It's not a question of being more good than bad in order to qualify for eternal life. Jesus defines goodness in terms of being like God. On that basis there are no good people anywhere. The Bible has a very stark view of human nature. We're all sinners. None of us are good.

Theologian, Wayne Grudem (**picture**), explains: "*It is not just that some parts of us are sinful and others are pure. Rather, every part of our being is affected by sin—our intellects, our emotions and desires, our hearts...our goals and motives, and even our physical bodies.*" God doesn't send good people to hell; there's no such thing as a good person. We only think we're good because we compare ourselves with those who are worse sinners than we are, not with those who are better.

I read about a guy who put his beer, wine, cigars, and an "adult" magazine on the counter. As the clerk rang up the total, the man suddenly dropped a candy bar in front of her. "I almost forgot," he said guiltily. "My one vice."

The very intelligent. Atheist, Richard Dawkins (**picture**) points out that only 7% of American scientists believe in God. Many equate faith with a blind leap in the dark or wishful thinking. The faith the Bible requires is intelligent faith. It's not blind or irrational. Biblical faith is a committing trust with an object (God) who is worthy of our faith. No one is asked to sacrifice their intellect when they put their faith in the God of the Bible.

When Jesus had a conversation with a lawyer, He equated intelligence with knowing God. "*When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.'*" (Mark 12:34). An intelligent response

from the scribe caused Jesus to note that the man was close to the kingdom of God. The Bible encourages people to use their minds when examining the evidence. God doesn't expect us to act in faith toward Him unless that faith is an intelligent faith built upon the solid foundation of what He's done in history and has recorded in His Word. He urges us to think and investigate His claims. The Bible equates intelligence with knowing God. Foolishness describes those who reject Him. Because our ego gets in the way, many very intelligent individuals have difficulty believing in and trusting the God of the Bible.

The bottom line is that Jesus wasn't picking on money, any more than He picks on morality or intelligence. They're all symptoms of an inner problem.

Riches were this young man's idol. The temptation to hoard all he had was a symptom of his lost condition. But the "one thing" could be anything. It could be an immoral relationship or an addiction or anything that you don't want to surrender to follow Jesus, and it keeps you from having eternal life.

3. Salvation is humanly impossible, "Those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?' But He said, 'What is impossible with man is possible with God'." In the days of Christ, people believed that rich people would automatically be in the kingdom. Wealth was seen as evidence of God's blessing on your life. Poverty was seen as a punishment for sin which is why the poor were called *sinners*. John D. Rockefeller (**picture**) agreed. He once said that "riches were a gift from heaven" showing God's love for the rich.

Jesus makes it clear, that's simply not true. Riches are not an indication of being blessed by God. His point is that since God is the God of the impossible, it's only God Who makes salvation possible.

Do you sometimes doubt God could save someone like you? Don't despair. With God all things are possible. God can rescue the worst sinner. No one is beyond His grace. *Grace* not *place*, is what makes our salvation possible.

4. The compensation for following Christ is immeasurable, "And Peter said, 'See, we have left our homes and followed you.' And He said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life'." The disciples were obtuse. They didn't understand what Jesus was saying, but they did have the self-renouncing faith the rich ruler lacked.

I like Jesus' math. He says that not only will the one who makes sacrifices receive a reward in eternity, but will receive many times more in this time.

Following Jesus means the surrender of everything, but this isn't *Prosperity Theology*, that we follow Jesus for what we can get out of it. It's that God rewards those who trust and obey Him.

The Christian life is often difficult, but the gifts we receive in the present (God's grace, freedom from slavery to sin, God's presence and power) far outweigh benefits enjoyed by those who cling to this world and reject Christ.

H.P. Hunt, the Texas millionaire, said, "If you know how rich you are, you're not very rich." The really rich have no idea of how rich they are.

Christians don't realize how rich they are. When you see the child of billionaire like a Warren Buffett (**picture**), you know they lack for nothing. For example, the Mega-Million winning ticket was worth \$1.6 billion. Did you know Warren Buffett is leaving his three children \$2 billion each and they don't have to buy a ticket? It's because Warren Buffett is their father. When God is your father, Warren Buffett's wealth is paltry in comparison.

That was the outlook of the great missionary, David Livingstone (**picture**). Once someone, thinking of the trials and sorrows Livingstone had endured, how he'd lost his wife and ruined his health, said to him, "What sacrifices you have made!" To which Livingstone answered, "Sacrifices? I have never made a sacrifice in all my life."

It's interesting that Peter speaks of leaving material things, like a home. Jesus' emphasis though is on the sacrifice of relationships; *wife or brothers or parents or children*, a much more significant sacrifice.

Many have lost a family or been rejected for accepting Christ. Some have been murdered, as in the Muslim world, by their family for accepting Christ. For others, it means like the Apostle Paul, choosing to remain single and thus forgoing a spouse and children for Christ. Heaven only knows the impact of those who chose to remain single for the sake of furthering the gospel like Mary Slessor, Amy Carmichael, Bruce Olson...to name a few.

We leave one house; God opens a hundred doors. We leave a family; God makes us part of a family that encompasses the world and heaven, too. We have more family members in Christ than we can begin to imagine.

Those who willingly forsake the stuff of this world to follow Jesus soon discover God has far more in store for them than the sum total of everything they've left behind. When Jesus speaks of "many times more," He means more than we can imagine. He's telling us that He has far more for us than anything we will ever give up to follow Him.

You can't out-give God! But we must remember that God doesn't always pay out in this life, but He always pays and always pays well. Then, Jesus ices the cake! "And in the age to come, eternal life." We'll get much in this life for following Jesus and will receive much more in the age to come.

Conclusion: This wasn't just for the rich young ruler or the disciples. It's for us. What kind of radical change in your lifestyle is Jesus calling to you? What does He really mean for you when He calls you to follow Him?

He doesn't usually ask us to give it all away to the poor, but He does put His finger of conviction on any area of our lives that we're holding back from Him. Is Jesus asking you to surrender something to Him? It's only when we put God first that we have His blessing. He calls us to surrender. He calls us to trust Him.

So, what happened to Lee Atwater (**picture**)? We didn't finish his story. The meanest man in American politics who was cut down at the age of 40 with a brain tumor, died March 29, 1991, on Good Friday.

These were his words a few months before he died: *"I have found Jesus Christ. It's that simple. He has made a difference and I am glad I found him while there is still time. The things that once counted in my life—power, fame and glory—no longer have meaning. I don't hate anybody anymore. For the first time in my life, I don't hate anybody. I have nothing but good feelings toward people. There's just no point in fighting and feuding."*

What happened to him can happen to you. Do you know Christ today? You can. **Two questions** and we're done.

Do you have a "one thing"? What's keeping you from coming to Christ? Is it wealth, morality, intellectual pride? Don't let one thing keep you from following Christ? Don't let your one thing send you to a Christless eternity?

Let me illustrate this way. Say you have a friend that's dying of some terrible disease. You take him to the doctor and the doctor says, "I have a remedy for you. If you just follow my advice you'll be healed and will live a long and fruitful life, but there's only one problem: while you're taking my remedy you can't eat chocolate." But what if your friend turned to you and said, "Forget it. No chocolate? What's the use of living? I'm not going to give up eating chocolate."

If Christ is really God, all conditions are gone. There can be no "one thing." To know Jesus Christ is to say, "Lord, anywhere your will touches my life, anywhere your Word speaks, I will say, 'Lord, I will obey. There are no conditions anymore. I surrender all'."

If He's really God, Jesus can't just be a supplement. We have to come to Him and say, "Okay, Lord, I'm willing to let you start a complete reordering of my life." The young ruler was unwilling to do that. What about you?

Is Jesus calling you to surrender something? You're a Christ-follower but there's something you need to leave that's hindering you in following Him. What do you need to surrender? What's Jesus asking you to leave to follow Him? Surrender it today! Don't be like this young ruler and go your own way empty and sorrowful.